

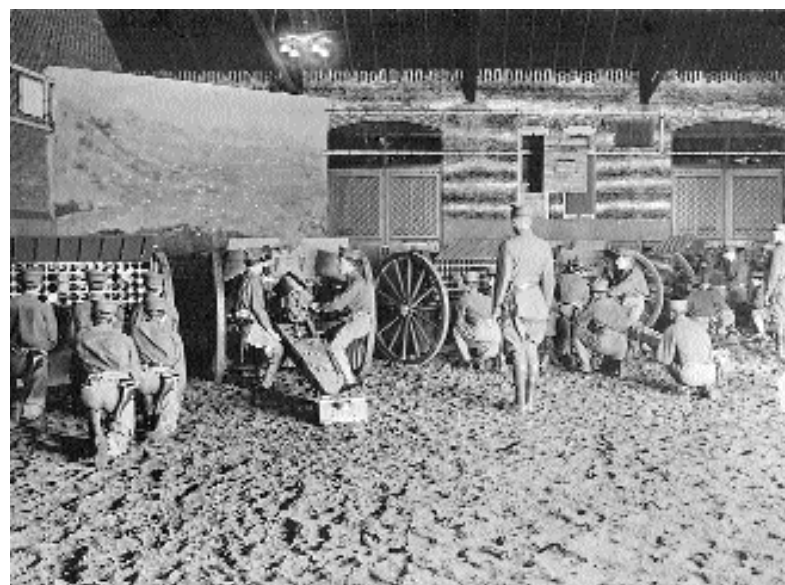
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Studying Armories

DoD's Legacy Program Funds New York State Survey

Detail from second floor landing, Troop C Armory, Brooklyn, NY. Photo by Merrill Hesck, New York State Historic Preservation Office, 1993.

Target practice, believed to be the Sixth Battery, 104th Field Artillery, date unknown. Courtesy New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs.



The New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO) has recently completed a comprehensive, intensive level survey of (and subsequent National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form for) pre-World War II Army National Guard armories in New York State. The project was nearly fully funded by a grant in 1992 from the U.S. Department of Defense's Legacy Resource Management Program, a federal fund designed to subsidize the identification, evaluation and protection of cultural and natural resources under Defense's stewardship. A subsequent, fiscal year 1994 grant is being used to add individual listings to the earlier National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, to conduct outreach and educational events to promote public awareness and appropriate preservation of New York's armories, and to publish a book and produce a documentary about the armories.

Built to house local units of the various states' volunteer militia, today's National Guard armories are perhaps the most imposing, tangible reminders of the role of the citizen soldier in American military history. The armory as a specific building type is a product of the post Civil War era, even though a variety of generic storage facili-

ties for munitions (such as powder magazines, arsenals, etc.) were common even during the earliest years of the Colonial Period.

A foundation for the study of the armory as a building type is presented in *America's Armories: Architecture, Society and Public Order* (1989) by Robert Fogelson. Over the past several decades, numerous articles have been published in a variety of scholarly journals (mostly historical and architectural publications) and several theses and dissertations have appeared on the subject; however, Fogelson's is the first comprehensive study of the dozens of large-scale, regimental armories in the biggest metropolises of the country. This ground-breaking study of the country's "biggest" and "best" armories provides a valuable framework for studying America's hundreds and hundreds of smaller, often single-company armories in small to mid-sized communities all across the country.

Fogelson's book and NYSHPO's subsequent Legacy-funded survey confirm the fact that New York State contains the best, most distinguished collection of historic Army National Guard armories in the country in terms of both quantity and quality. At one time, there may have been nearly a thousand historic armories in America; today, perhaps only 300-400 survive.¹ The majority of these are located in the Northeast and Midwest states of the country, primarily in relatively heterogeneous, industrialized regions. Most are located in urban areas, although some are in suburban communities; few, if any, are in rural areas. Most of the country's extant armories are believed to date from the early-20th century; a significant number were built during the WPA era. (For example, all of Oklahoma's 50+ historic armories date from the 1930s.) Many of these early-20th century armories are not especially distinguished or sophisticated architecturally, particularly in comparison to other public buildings in their respective communities built during the same period.

In stark contrast, many of New York State's 70+ armories date from the late-19th-century and are elaborately rendered in flamboyant, Victorian-era interpretations of Medieval Gothic military architecture. Most of the state's armories are massive, castellated-style fortresses distinguished by bastions, towers, turrets, and/or bartizans; crenelated parapets and machicolated cornices; sally ports and portcullises; and even, occasionally, moats and drawbridges. Many of these armories are prominently sited in vital, downtown locations (primarily county seats); virtually all are imposing edifices in their local contexts, often complementing their respective communities' finest public buildings and civic complexes. Historically, most armories were designed to be

community centers as well as military facilities; presently, in an era of rampant suburban sprawl, many of these same armories are serving as catalysts to downtown revitalization and economic development in some of the state's most needy urban business districts.

The Initial Survey

In 1992, the NYSHPO received a grant from the Legacy Resource Management program to inventory and evaluate its pre-World War II armories. The survey was conducted according to standard NYSHPO survey guidelines (which are, in turn, based on policies set by the National Park Service in National Register Bulletin 24, *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation*.) A literature search was conducted, a

Who/What is the National Guard?

The National Guard, despite its deceptive name, is essentially a state-based entity. Most military organizations in America, such as the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines (as well as the Army Reserves and the Naval Reserves) are federal entities under direct and complete control of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). Similarly, America's primary reserve components, i.e., the Army Reserve, Naval Reserve, and Marine Corps Reserve (there is no Air Force Reserve) are also federal entities. America's secondary reserve component, i.e., the National Guard, consists of two elements: the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard, both of which are state-based and state-run entities, although they are, ultimately, accountable to DoD's Department of the Army and Department of the Air Force, respectively.

The predominantly centralized structure of the American military is, for the most part, a fairly recent phenomenon: it was not until the early-20th century that a strong, federalized military system emerged and ultimately eclipsed the formerly decentralized, state- and locally-based military units that had, since the Colonial era, comprised the backbone of the American military system. During the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, the Colonies (and, subsequently, the Republic) depended on the "militia system," i.e., trained citizen soldiers who served only in times of emergency (and who had other daily vocations) rather than on a "standing army," i.e., professional soldiers whose sole vocation was the military.

Companies, the basic building block of the militia, originally were locally-based units with strong, hometown ties. Militiamen (and their self-chosen leaders) were usually neighbors who joined together, served together, and often retired together; consequently, individual companies usually had unique local or regional "character" and strong, community-based loyalties. The local companies were organized into regional regiments,

battalions or brigades; all units were more or less loosely united under their respective state governments. Prior to the Dick Act of 1903, there was little, if any, formal (or binding) federal direction or control.

The modern National Guard is the 20th-century outgrowth of the 19th-century militia: first and foremost, National Guardsmen and -women are volunteer citizen soldiers whose primary vocations are non-military. Companies are still formed at the local level and are still overseen by their respective state governments. Each state has its own Adjutant General, usually appointed by its respective governor, although occasionally elected at large. The states operate relatively autonomously regarding their Guards, although they adhere to policies and directives established by the National Guard Bureau (NGB), a division of the DoD's Department of the Army. (Occasionally, such as during wars or national emergencies or disasters, the states' National Guard units are called directly into federal service.)

Unlike the old militia, however, which historically comprised the bulk of troops purportedly prepared for action, the modern, decentralized National Guard serves as an auxiliary to the country's main, centralized Armed Forces. Although still serving in combat—even as recently as Desert Storm—the National Guard, in the 20th century, is most widely renowned for its role in keeping domestic peace and aiding victims of disaster (both natural—such as flooding and fires—and man-made—such as terrorist bombings).

Despite the evolution of the Guards' duties, the various units of the National Guard often retain the same kinds of localized character and hometown loyalties which distinguished their 19th-century counterparts. Many modern National Guard units are justifiably proud of their regimental heritage, and nowhere is the heritage of the volunteer citizen soldier so tangibly and imposingly manifested as in the individual state armories scattered all across America.

variety of primary and secondary sources were consulted, and every single pre-World War II armory in the state was visited, photographed, and documented on New York State Building/Structure Inventory Forms. Much to the surprise of SHPO staff, the armories, both collectively and individually, retained a remarkably high degree of integrity of setting, design, materials, craftsmanship, and feeling; all extant armories were virtually intact, thereby circumventing the need to grapple with "minimum" levels of integrity required for National Register eligibility and/or listing. (Because of the rarity of the resource type at both the state and national levels, armories were presumed to be both architecturally and historically significant under criteria A & C at the outset of the project.)

Because of financial and time constraints, the survey and subsequent National Register nomination forms were, in most cases, a synthesis of previously published (or produced) materials (including the aforementioned book by Fogelson, a history of the National Guard written by Renee

Hylton and Robert K. Wright, Jr., and a survey of New York City's armories by Anne Beha, Associates) coupled with assessments of the current conditions of the buildings and, occasionally (when easily accessible), previously undiscovered primary or secondary sources. As a result, the survey and most of the National Register forms are not the definitive and/or final word on New York's armories; they merely contain enough information to justify the buildings' eligibility according to the National Register criteria.

Fortunately, a second Legacy grant was obtained to publish a full-length book about New York's armories. Extensive research has already been conducted toward completing the book—some of it, in fact, spotlighting some rather gross inaccuracies presented in the survey! (For example, the information in the survey suggested some of New York's 1930s armories were constructed under the auspices of the WPA Program; this appeared, at the time, to be a logical guess, because armories were, indeed, a popular type to receive WPA or PWA funding. However, further

The Legacy Resource Management Program

The Legacy Resource Management Program, a multi-year, multi-million dollar program enacted by U.S. Congressional legislation in 1991, provides the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) both guidance and funding for identifying and protecting its significant natural and cultural resources. In the highly competitive Legacy grant process, the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO) had the good fortune of being at the right place at the right time. During the 11th hour of fiscal year 1992, Renee Hylton, historian for the National Guard Bureau in Washington, DC, was courting potential sub-grantees for a grant she had obtained from the Legacy Program on behalf

of National Guard units across the country. Only three states were ready, willing, and able to accept a sub-grant: the Oklahoma National Guard (and its sub-subgrantee, the Oklahoma SHPO) received money to nominate Oklahoma's WPA era armories to the National Register of Historic Places and to prepare a book about the history of state armories in the national context; the South Carolina National Guard (and its sub-subgrantee, the South Carolina Educational Television Corporation) received money to produce a PBS documentary about National Guard armories across the country; and the New York National Guard [i.e., the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA) and its sub-subgrantee, the New York SHPO] received money to inventory all and nominate many of its 70+ pre-World War II armories to the state and national registers of historic places via a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF).

During the past three years, the nascent partnership established between DMNA and NYSHPO has flourished into a remarkably strong and effective cooperative to preserve, protect and promote New York's architecturally and historically-significant armories. In fiscal year 1994, NYSHPO (with DMNA as its primary partner) applied directly to Legacy for additional funds to expand upon the important, but preliminary, work completed with the fiscal year 1992 grant. SHPO received a substantial, multi-year grant for a four-part project:

Guthrie Armory, Guthrie, Oklahoma, built between 1935 and 1937. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1994.





27th Separate Company Armory (built c.1892),Malone, NY. Photo c. 1930's courtesy Gladys Chetny, Franklin County Historical Society.

research revealed that not a single armory in New York State was built with WPA money.) The book, scheduled for publication in 1996, hopes to clear up any inaccuracies in either the survey or the subsequent National Register materials, and, of course, to greatly expand upon the skeletal information gathered in 1992. In the meantime, the following narrative, derived from the National Register nomination form, is still believed to be an accurate summary of New York State's historic armories.

New York's State Armories

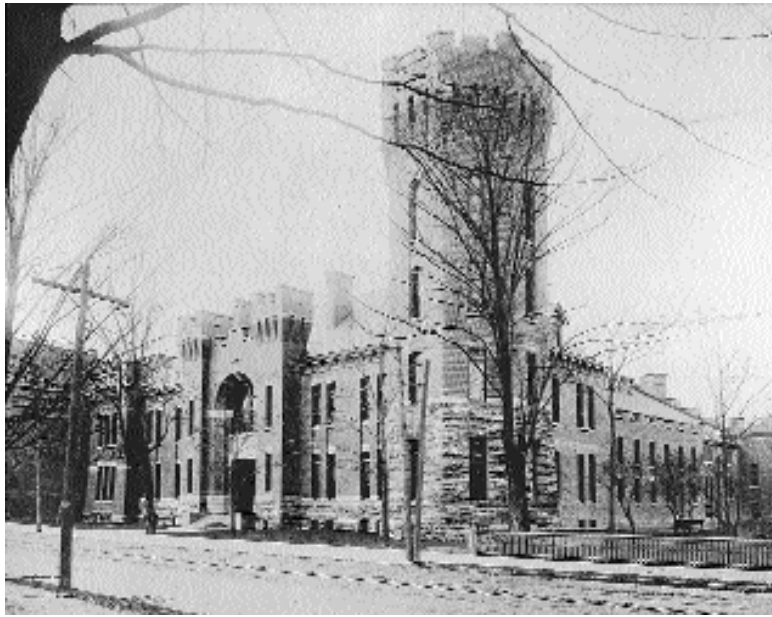
Built in 1879, the lavish and imposing Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue in New York City marked the emergence of the National Guard armory as a unique American building type and immediately became the standard that inspired armory construction in the United States during the next half century. Built for Manhattan's elite "Silk Stocking" regiment (one of the country's oldest, most distinguished units), the Seventh Regiment Armory was, and still is, internationally

phase 1 (completed in December 1994) called for the nomination of 10 additional armories to the National Register (as addenda to the MPDF prepared with the fiscal year 1992 grant); phase 2 (currently underway) calls for outreach, education and "public relations" events to promote awareness and appreciation of the state's armories (and to encourage their maintenance and restoration according to the Department of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation); phase 3 (recently begun) calls for the publication of a coffee-table book about the state's historic armories; and phase 4 (pending) calls for the production of a documentary to be based on the aforementioned book.

It is *not* particularly remarkable that NYSHPO was anxious to jump at the opportunity to conduct an in-depth study of its state armories; after all, most SHPOs are aware of and interested in the broad range of historic military resources in their respective states but on federal land (or under federal jurisdiction)—ranging from small, state-owned, single company armories on crowded urban lots to expansive bases and camps often thousands of acres in extent whose boundaries encompass a wealth of archeological resources and historic buildings/structures. What is remarkable, in the case of New York's project, is 1) the whole-hearted support of DMNA, a state agency that, until recently, might not have been characterized as "pro-preservation;" 2) the virtually unprecedented availability of substantial funding through a federal agency; and 3) a surprisingly

conducive political climate that enabled a variety of often sparring local, state and federal entities to bury their differences and, instead, to harmoniously cooperate in a win-win project.

At the Department of the Army's National Guard Bureau in Washington, DC, historian Renee Hylton deserves recognition for her efforts to keep a spotlight on the Army National Guard's cultural resources; these state-based facilities are often eclipsed by the far more prominent, powerful and prolific "regular" Army installations. At New York's DMNA, Col. James O'Toole (former Acting Adjutant General) and LtCs William Knox and Maurice Savage (both of DMNA's Environmental Unit) are to be commended for their efforts to keep the project on the agency's front burner at a time when the country's military installations are being directed to increase preparedness while at the same time decrease spending. At NYSHPO, Wint Aldrich [Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation, Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)] and Ruth Pierpont (Director of OPRHP's Field Services Bureau) deserve recognition for their willingness to take on such a large project when so many other SHPO projects, programs, and services are desperately competing for SHPO staff attention. In an unprecedented move, SHPO elected to complete the project "in-house" rather than subgranting it out to a freelance consultant, thereby allowing for close control of both the quality and timeliness of the project.



17th Separate Company Armory (c. 1904), Flushing, Queens. Courtesy NYSDMNA.

renowned for its distinguished interiors by L.C. Tiffany and Stanford White.²

Three primary features distinguish the armory as a specific building type. First, in terms of function, the armory serves not only as a military facility but also as a clubhouse for the guardsmen and as a civic monument designed to convey power, pride and patriotism. Second, in terms of form and plan, the armory consists of an administration building with an attached drill shed at ground level. Finally, in terms of design and decoration, the armory reflects the influence of Medieval Gothic military architecture: many armories are fortress-like castles distinguished by

soaring towers, crenellated parapets, and machicolated cornices, projecting turrets and bartizans, and massive sally ports with iron portcullises.

Armory construction in New York State between c. 1880 and c. 1940 can be divided into three distinct phases, each with its own specific features and each reflecting a particular trend in military history and/or socio-economic-political conditions of its respective period. The first, most prolific phase occurred between c. 1880 and c. 1900; armories constructed during this phase were among the most “castle-like” in appearance, often characterized by exaggerated asymmetry, soaring towers, crenellated parapets, and massive sally ports. These armories were meant to be literal fortresses, designed to defend respectable, middle- and upper-class Americans from the “dangerous classes,” i.e., the unruly throngs of laborers and immigrants (many of whom were professed Socialists and Anarchists) who seemed to indicate that America was on the brink of class warfare. Many of the armories built during this phase, particularly those in Upstate New York, were designed by the renowned State Architect, Isaac G. Perry.

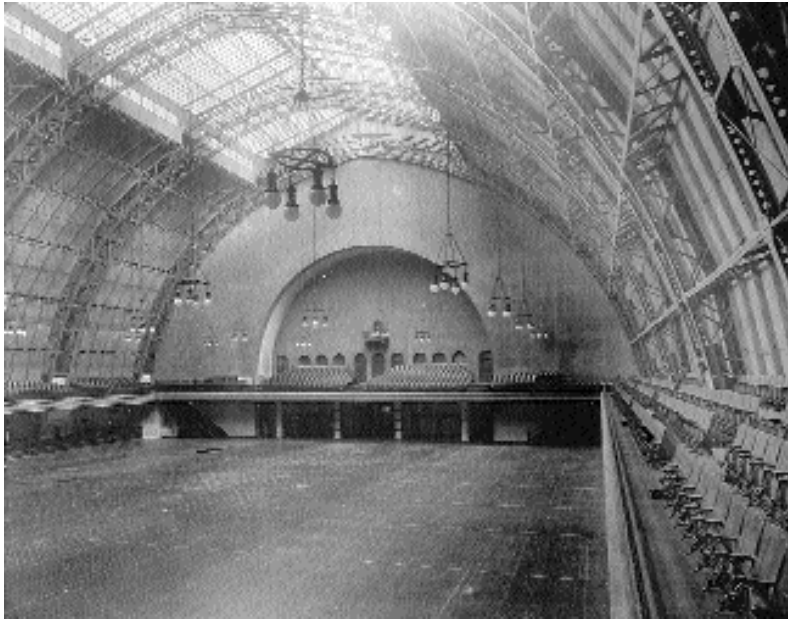
The second phase (c. 1900–c. 1920) of armory construction marked the demise of the castellated style and the increasing popularity of more restrained, even classically flavored interpretations of medieval military architecture. Armories constructed during this phase marked the demise of the fear of class warfare at the domestic level and the emergence of the United States as a global power in an era of imperialism and expansionism



Veterans' Room, designed and decorated by Louis Comfort Tiffany and Stanford White. Seventh Regiment Armory, Park Avenue, New York City. Courtesy NYSHPO National Register files.



Hudson Armory (c. 1898), Hudson, NY. 1930s photo courtesy Tom Duclos, Curator, NYSDMNA.



Drill Hall, 69th
Regiment Armory
(c. 1906);
Lexington Avenue,
New York City.
Courtesy
NYSDMNA.

(particularly after the Spanish-American War in 1898). At the local level, this phase also marked the emergence of the armory as a civic center designed for community use. The internationally-renowned Armory Show of 1913, the first and most important exhibit of Modern Art in America, was held in New York City's 69th Regiment Armory, built in 1906.

Armories built during the last phase (c. 1930–c. 1940) continued to emphasize the facility's importance as a community center. Armories were often the only public spaces in their communities suitable for large-scale social and recreational events. Immensely popular boxing

matches, trade shows, and even circuses, for example, were often held in armories. Stylistically, armories built during this phase display a remarkably broad range of influences, ranging from simple, classically inspired buildings, to Gothic/Tudor Revival, to Art Deco.

The state militia, having dominated the American military system since the Colonial era, was eclipsed during the 20th century by the increasingly popular and powerful Federal standing Army (and, later, Navy and Air Force). Although still serving in combat (even as recently as Desert Storm), the National Guard today is more widely recognized for its role in maintaining domestic peace and providing relief to victims of natural disasters. Numerous companies and regiments have disbanded during the past few decades; dozens of old armories have been deaccessioned. Of those dozens, many are now owned by local governments; many of those owned by New York City serve as homeless shelters. Many of the privately-owned armories have been adaptively reused as YMCAs, apartment complexes, commercial facilities, and even private homes.

Many more historic armories may soon be deaccessioned by the Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA); those that are (and will remain) in state ownership desperately need appropriate care and restoration. SHPO and DMNA staff hope that the variety of projects funded by the Legacy Management Program will contribute to the preservation of these incomparable resources.

- 1 These figures and the subsequent sweeping generalizations about armories in the national context are guesstimates; further research (i.e., comprehensive level surveys of every state's respective armories) is needed to confirm these speculations. The author of this article is solely responsible for any gross misrepresentations, overstatements, and/or understatements.
- 2 The Seventh Regiment Armory was declared a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1986; it is the only armory in America to have achieved that level of distinction, although a second armory, New York's 69th Regiment Armory, is pending NHL designation.

Nancy Todd is a Survey and National Register Program Analyst, New York State Historic Preservation Office, Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Waterford, NY. She carried out all aspects of both grants described in this article. For more information on either the armories themselves or on any of the Legacy projects related to New York's armories, contact Nancy Todd at the New York SHPO at 518-237-8643 x 262.



Niagara Falls Armory (c. 1895), Niagara Falls, NY. Courtesy SSG. Fred Gibson, D-152nd Engr Bn (C).